

Magnifying Employee Performance During The Covid-19 Pandemic: The Role Of Employee Empowerment In MSME Food Manufacturing Industries In Kerala.

Prasob K¹, Dr. Amudha R²

¹Research Scholar, Dept. of Management Studies, Karunya Institute of Technology & Sciences, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu

²Associate Professor, Dept. of Management Studies, Karunya Institute of Technology & Sciences, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu

Abstract: This study is a part of more in-depth research investigating the employee performance-enhancing factors and the role of empowerment during the Covid-19 pandemic in selected MSME food manufacturing industries in Kerala. This research focuses on introducing and testing a model to show the relationship between employee empowerment and employee performance. A conceptual framework was developed to identify the areas in which a literature review was performed. The conceptual framework is on employee empowerment, employee satisfaction, and employee commitment deciding the effectiveness and impact on employee performance. In the present research, employee performance is the key dependent variable. From 110 employees, the responses collected via a survey-based structured questionnaire. Collected responses were analyzed, and formulated hypotheses were tested using standard statistical tools such as mean, standard deviation, one-sample t-test, correlation coefficient. The responses analyzed and hypotheses testing have resulted in a particular phenomenon.

Keywords: employee empowerment, employee commitment, employee performance.

INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is a crucial factor that contributes directly to the overall effective performance of the company. With increased competition in the business arena, companies today are keen to boost employee performance, profitability, market reach, and brand recognition. Employee performance measurement is not an easy task, and companies need to plan it well to execute it for desired results. If a company wants to assess all employees' performance levels, the owner requires proper planning with the performance administrator. Based on that discussion, specific standards must be established, and continuous employee evaluations must be done in various aspects. However, simple employee performance evaluation is not enough- and it requires mentoring and grooming sessions. Most organizations conduct training for their employees. Ridvan Arslan & N. Tufan Uzaslan (2017) show that equipping overall performance was considered significant by both the employees involved and the company. The best practice to boost the input of employees in a company is the reprimand followed by an encouragement policy. It recalled that a worker's performance also depends on their relationship with the company, so it is also essential for a company to motivate and groom an employee to get the best results. Nuning Nurna Dewia and Rudi Wibowo (2020) show that Leadership Style, Organizational Culture, empowerment factors, and Motivation simultaneously influence the performance of employees.

Empowerment is the authority given by management to its employees to act independently to meet expectations. In the era of the unprecedented pandemic, there is a need for employee empowerment to take quick decisions and act quickly to any changes in the environment. An empowering organization emphasizes autonomy, proper information sharing, individual participation and teamwork to achieve organizational success. To achieve empowerment in the organization, the executives must ensure that employees have the right mix of Information, knowledge, power, and rewards to work more enthusiastically. The impact of empowerment on employee performance is enormous, and it is a widely studied subject by scholars. Jay A. Conger and Rabindra N. Kanungo (1988) find empowerment as an emerging construct used by theorists to explain organizational effectiveness. Archana and Dr. M.P. Singh (2018) find that empowerment is the process of sharing power with employees. The empowerment of employees depends on mutual trust and respect. Employee involvement in the decision-making helps the organization build the corporation between them. A distinction was made between organizational empowerment, a bundle of HRM activities, and psychological empowerment by Ruta Kazlauskaitė, Ilona Buciniene, and Linas Turauskas (2011). Organizational empowerment was undoubtedly related to psychological

empowerment, job satisfaction, and Affective Commitment. Psychological empowerment and affective commitment were found to mediate the impact of organizational empowerment on customer-oriented behaviour. Food processing in India was started as a family profession. V.P Sriraman & Dr L. Rathakrishnan (2008) finds that the food processing sector in the country, with its vast potential, has emerged as one of the primary drivers of economic growth and is often hailed as a sunrise industry. The organized food industry was started for the British officers and settlers. Despite the lack of training, they prepared quality foods like pickles, papads, fried, roasted, and puffed cereals for local consumptions. During the second world war, the number of these units multiplied to satisfy the needs of the troops. The products produced were bread, biscuits, jams, squashes, and syrups. It is impossible to acquire adequate growth in the value-added food processing sector without establishing well-organized facilities identified only during the eighties. Processed foods provide a good export opportunity and generate employment in rural areas to restrict population migration to cities. Dr V.R. Palanivelu & A. Apdhu Katar (2016) conclude that though many good dynamics support the potential for growth of this industry, there are still some significant constraints that, if not addressed sooner, can impede the growth prospects of the Food Processing Industry in India.

Kerala has always been a 'leader state' in food processing. A state with a food processing sector formed a backbone towards making significant contributions to food exports since independence. Though small in size, Kerala is a very fertile land with a diverse range of crops providing numerous opportunities for value addition. The food processing industry is gaining vast importance with emerging markets and technologies. The research performed in the food industry is deficient compared to its contributions. In their article regarding MSME, A. Sathish and Dr S. Rajamohan (2019) reveal that the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector has emerged as complementary for large industries as ancillary units. MSME food industries in Kerala have an excellent capacity to grow and contribute to the Kerala financial system. It is enormously contributing to the enhancement of the socio-economic profile of the state by providing extensive employment opportunities at a lower cost comparatively than large industries. It is necessary to support the MSMEs, educate and give power to them to make optimum utilization of the resources, both human and economic, be informed of the latest developments taking place globally, and help acquire skills necessary to keep pace with the global developments. Rajeswari G (2019) observed that most of these enterprises are unaware and do not understand how they can benefit from them.

The management seeks new techniques and methods to improve the performance of their employees with minimum cost and maximum utilization of resources. Several factors affect employee performance, and in this article, we study the impact of employee empowerment on employee performance. The empirical study conducted by Shilpa N.C and Dr Amulya M (2019) finds that the value addition in the food processing industry has tremendously amplified over the years. Mrs Caral Lopes, Ms Dhara Kachalia (2016) find that employees should adopt new coping strategies to maintain good physical and mental conditions and improve productivity. This study was conducted amid a pandemic that severely affected our economy, which was unexpected. Covid '19 and its impact on the economy is a subject that needs more depth investigations individually. Shaik Rubeena & Rafia Naz (2020) finds that to support the health of their employees, companies have tried various tools and technological aspects during the crisis. In Kerala, Covid 19 on food industries are innumerable, to overcome this situation and building a new healthy market is the challenge the management side faces. Most food manufacturing industries, especially MSME firms, face a severe crisis on the financial side. The manufacturing cost is increasing day by day, but raising the price of their products is dreadful due to the poor market conditions. Repeatedly Kerala faced numerous tragic situations in the past years like Demonitisation, First and second Flood, and now in Covid 19. The purchasing power of ordinary people is decreased due to the financial scenario, and at the same time, MSME food manufacturing units face cutthroat competition from MNC.'

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the level of motivation among employees, which should enhance their level of performance.
- To examine the degree to which employees feel empowered in the food manufacturing industries in Kerala.
- To evaluate the relationship between employee empowerment and employee performance in the food manufacturing industries in Kerala.
- To suggest ways to improve the performance of employees in the food manufacturing industries in Kerala.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The employees in the food manufacturing industry in Kerala are not motivated to enhance their performance
The employees in the food manufacturing industry in Kerala are not sufficiently empowered in their roles.
There is no significant relationship between empowerment and improvement in performance in the food manufacturing industry in Kerala

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employees are the force that drives a company forward. So it should come as no surprise that the daily performance of the workforce hugely influences the success or failure of a business. Senait Laike (2017) study results have provided necessary implications on the relationship between organizational culture and performance management practices. Sara R. Colorosa & Carole J. Makela (2016) find that the managers have successfully created an environment that empowers all employees to be successful and perform their jobs using their skills and strengths; they stopped focusing on the behaviours and started focusing on the measurable outcomes. In this pandemic time, businesses must find ways to maintain and bring out the best performance from their employees. The current appraisal method is fragile and inappropriate in Leila Najafi, Yadollah Hamidi, Sudabeh Vatankhah, Abdolhosein Punraj (2010). Therefore, it seems necessary to reform this critical process both in content and performance.

Human history has witnessed great ruptures that have affected all societies in different periods. Depressions and crises such as wars, natural disasters (famine, earthquake, fire, climate irregularities, etc.), epidemics, economic emergency, terrorist activities, and political disputes have been indicated as the Causes of these significant ruptures. They have caused radical changes by affecting the economy of all societies. Unfortunately, the current situation we are experiencing today, which the Covid-19 epidemic has caused, is a global depression, leading to large-scale ruptures. Beyza Erer (2021) reveals that when the national and international literature was examined, no study to address the performance of employees and the fear of Covid-19. Wadi B Alonaz (2020) suggests that healthcare providers' empathic environment may significantly increase employee performance. B Suresh Lal, Phalguni Sachdeva, Simran, Tanu Mittal (2020) finds the Coronavirus pandemic, and the following restrictions on mobility have heightened this crucial sector's vulnerabilities. The research findings from Mahmud Hamid and Dr Sazali Abdul Wahab (2020) explained that COVID-19 and employees' reactions to change significantly negatively impact employees' performance. These 'new normal' changes negatively affected employees' work concentration, communication, and concentration on work significantly. Galih Fajar Muttaqin1, Muhammad Taqi, Bustanul Arifin (2020) studied this and suggested that Increased innovation, job satisfaction, and supervisory supervision are needed to improve the job performance of companies during this pandemic. Indranil Bose (2018) has suggested the fundamental goal of HR in an organization. The research conducted in partnership with Microsoft and the Boston Consulting Group recommends establishing traditional means of connecting with the team and maintaining those routines, even amid change and disruption.

The outcome from Henry Ongori (2009) article indicates that employee empowerment is essential in uncertainty to enable the organization to respond quickly to any changes in the environment and reduce employee turnover. Munish and Rachna Agarwal (2017) indicate that good training & development, compensation structures, autonomy, quality of work-life, work policies, and arrangements will lead the managers and management to a new dimension with a holistic approach in the field of employee retention & engagement.

Empowering employees is a culture. It takes an increase in trust, clear communication, and strategic delegation. Sambil Charles Mukwakungu, Charles Mbohwa, and Sihle Mankazana (2018) show a significant employee empowerment level. Dean Tjosvold and Haifa Sun (2005) indicate that managers' perspective toward power, not just power itself, dramatically affects how power is used and how managers are empowered. Tahira Michelle Probst (2005) examined the effectiveness of increased organizational participative decision-making in reducing the negative consequences of job insecurity. Harpreet Singh and Dr Salvatore Fawa (2019) depict that employee participation in decision-making has positively affected employee attitude, commitment, and productivity, even on the managers' efficiency. Empowered employees are so close to issues and problems that require resolution facilitating a decrease in response time. Faced with a problem, people close to it have a natural affinity for it and a definitive reason to find solutions rapidly - it aids their work, making their time more accessible and more productive. Krishnaveni. R and Monica. R (2018) reveals that HRM methods, namely empowerment, competence development practice, recognition, and work engagement, have emerged as prominent predictors of employee performance. Sakib Imran Khan, Dr Keith Macky, and Dr Erling Rasmussen (2011) find the critical rationales behind their organizations' adoption of devolution strategy were to empower the line managers, make them more responsible, achieve a strategic approach to HR, and leverage line managers' proximity to the employees. Behdokht Rekabdar, D. Kane, C. Kwantes, and G. Chung-Yan (2015) highlight the importance of employee felt trustworthiness. Aniket. M. Kamble and Dr R. Gopal (2014) provide suggestions and practical guides to the management of the companies to promote the improvement of their companies and workers' performance for making decisions related to their interests. Kelly Tee Pei Leng (2013) provides insights into developing a taxonomy of good feedback practices by considering the views of the giver and the receiver of written feedback. Isabel Buila, Eva Martínezb, and Jorge Matute (2018) show that identification and engagement fully mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational citizenship behaviours, whereas engagement partially mediates the link between transformational leadership and job performance. Mohand Tuffaha (2020) indicates that knowledge management, information and communication technology, employee empowerment, innovation and creativity, and organization culture significantly impact employee performance. Dr Salini BNair and Shitha. M. S (2018) suggests that organizations should take care of the working conditions such as maintenance, temperature, lighting because the majority

of the employees are only moderately satisfied with working conditions.

Dr Rajesh Rathore (2015) Indicate that raising the level of employee performance may be attained by investigating and analyzing employee empowerment, considering the diagnosis and analysis of the requirements necessary to apply employee empowerment, such as organizational culture, participation, effective communication, continuous training, incentives system, managerial trust, clarity of role, executive support, getting the required information and teamwork. Empowered employees working without continual oversight from a manager or supervisor tend to feel more respected. Artificial obstacles to the progress of tasks are removed when employees no longer need their supervisor's approval to move from one stage to the next. E. Ashraf (2020) revealed that employee empowerment has a direct and significant impact on employee satisfaction. This helps productivity and profitability per employee improve accordingly. Suharno Pawirosumarto, Purwanto Katijan Sarjana, and Rachmad Gunawan (2016) show that work environment, leadership style, and organizational culture firmly and significantly impact job satisfaction only the leadership style positively and significantly affects employee performance. Seung-Bum Yang and Sang Ok Choi (2008) identified four dimensions of employee empowerment: autonomy, responsibility, Information, and creativity. Sarra Berries, Mehrez Chaher, Karim Ben Yahia (2014) reveal that this managerial practice increases employees' trust, positively affecting innovation and organizational performance. Ruta Kazlauskaitė, Ilona Buciniene, and Linas Turauskas (2011) reveal that organizational empowerment was positively related to psychological, job satisfaction, and affective commitment. Anitha J (2013) studies also reveal that the working environment should comprise a good culture, working with a good team, a good boss, good physical surroundings, job security, a sustainable compensation package, and availability of food and drink in the workplace. All these factors in the workplace could increase workers' morale and contribute to increased manufacturing productivity. Sylvie Guerrero, Denis Chênevert, Christian Vandenberghe, Michel Tremblay, and Ahmed Khalil Ben Ayed (2018) shows that positive customer feedback can substitute managers' leadership in helping frontline employees feel more in control of their work and psychologically empowered.

Empowered employees working without continual oversight from a manager or supervisors tend to feel more respected. Artificial obstacles to the progress of tasks are removed when employees no longer need their supervisor's approval to move from one stage to the next. Anastasios, D. Diamantidis Prodromos Chatzoglou (2018) suggest that managers should dynamically support employees' job-related actions. This support should be given to their employees personally and by improving both organizational climate and job environment, directly and indirectly, affecting their job performance levels. Darren James Elding (2018) found that performance was significant in predicting satisfaction with all individual job characteristics except 'Feedback from Supervisors,' 'Social Relations,' and 'Workload.' Tayo Emmanuel (2018) concluded that a total rewards system is vital in every financial industry. Since employers are looking for talented people, they must produce the types of rewards that will meet employees' needs to retain them for the long term. Aqeel Ahmed Soomro, Robert J. Breitenecker, and Syed Afzal Moshadi Shah (2017) indicate that work-life balance positively impacts employee performance. Shadi Habis Abualoush, Abdallah Mishael Obeidat, Ali Tarhini, Ra'ed Masa'deh, and Ali Al-Badi (2017) indicated that knowledge management and information systems positively and significantly affect

Employees' Empowerment. The latter impacts Employees' Performance as well. Sergio Fernandez and Bloomington Tima Moldogaziev (2013) suggest that using empowerment practices to stimulate innovation does not result in immediate gains in performance. Managers adopting such an approach must be patient for the organizational changes sparked by empowerment to bear fruit in performance improvements. Vineethan. T (2018) suggests that the joint efforts of all the various agencies in the MSME sector can bring a sustainable contribution to national income, employment, and exports. Kevin Baird, Amy Tung, and Sophia Su (2020) provide an empirical insight into the mediating role of the quality of performance appraisal systems on the association between employee empowerment and business unit performance. This helps productivity and profitability per employee improve accordingly.

Dr Silbert Jose S. V. & Mr Bijin Philip (2019) suggest that if employees' empowerment and recognition increase, their motivation to work improve, and their accomplishments and organizational performance increase. M M Bagali (2015) highlights how an organization could establish an outstanding organization and thus create a place to work. Sarra Berraies, Rached Chtioui, and Mehrez Chaher (2019) offer interesting insights to bankers by providing them with tools to improve their customers' relationships.

Kuranchie-Mensah, Elizabeth Boye, Amponsah-Tawiah, and Kwesi (2016) observed that management must ensure that employees are well due to the risk factors associated with the industry motivated to curb the rate at which employees embark on industrial unrest, affecting performance. Cecily Shibi Netto (2019) reveals the problems faced by the industry in Kerala, which range from the procurement of raw materials to the export of finished products. Taylor and Francis (2016) supported the universalistic theory of strategic human resource management, which believes that any organization can adopt a distinctive set of HR practices, which results in improved performance. Mohammed Kasim C (2019) suggests that a high vulnerability in food availability in the state calls for urgent policy attention on the production front.

Shilpa N.C. and Dr Amulya M. (2019) attempts to analyze the growth of the food processing industry in terms of employment and value addition. Emiko Fukase, Will Martin (2020) studies economic growth and its impact on the food demand and supply chain. Dr Deeja. S (2017) finds that the food processing industry holds tremendous opportunities for significant investments. Dhayita Rukti Tanaya and Fandis Ekyawan (2020), presented in this paper, has essential points

to deeply understand the existing MSME empowerment strategy in Indonesia implemented by BMC, the strategy shifts during the pandemic, and recommendations for strategic improvements.

María de la Cruz del Río-Rama, Martha Ríos-Manríquez, José Álvarez-García and María Dolores Sánchez-Fernández (2020) clarify that although information is necessary to train human capital, cognitive variables are more important in human capital empowerment. Brian Daly (2017) suggests that as the organization becomes more dependent on its employees' knowledge, their management becomes critical for the line managers. Laurian Unnevehr (2019) also allows comparisons with the manufacturing industry and an understanding of the industry as a significant economic contributor to regional economies. This focus on the food and beverage industry provides new insights regarding the industry's multiple roles, including the industry's contributions in meeting emerging consumer demands and responding to evolving public policy. Ms Shelly and Dr Kuldip Kaur (2015) based on the study, this paper's findings and conclusion are that the food processing industry is enormously significant for India's development. Peter T. Coleman (2014) speaks to the potential causal role of implicit power theories in shaping managers' responses to empowerment initiatives. When employees are empowered with responsibility, managers become freed to concentrate on strategy and the bigger picture. Instead of becoming enmeshed with day-to-day decision-making, managers can concentrate on strategic objectives, project planning, professional development customer-centric activities. Melissa Intindola, Judith Y. Weisinger, Philip Benson, and Thomas Pittz (2017) highlight the importance of a multi-level approach consisting of individual, human resource management (HRM) team, and organizational contingency factors when considering the efficacy of HR development efforts. Brijesh Singh, Rakesh Narain, and R.C. Yadav (2012) suggest that financial assistance through banks needs to be improved to adopt technological changes and expand to compete in present market conditions. Pravakar Sahoo and Ashwani (2020) suggest that the economy is heading towards a recession, and the situation demands systematic, well-targeted, and aggressive fiscal-monetary stimulus measures.

Davinder Singh, J.S. Khamba, and Tarun Nanda (2018) study has explored various problems and challenges faced by Indian MSMEs in the competitive environment and the technology innovation initiatives for obtaining and maintaining their manufacturing performance. Issifu Amadu Abdulai and Adinan Bahahudeen Shafiwu (2014) indicated that decision-making becomes easy when employees participate. This system creates a good working environment, increases commitment and satisfaction on decisions taken, and increases employee morale since they feel recognized as part of the organization's teaming and the direct consequence of all this improved productivity. Marjolein de Kort, R. F. Poell, and Dr M.J. D. Schalk (2016) analyses showed that employees with a high work-life conflict were less engaged in their work and were more likely to participate in employee development activities. Iqra Iqbal, Muhammad Zia-ud-Din, Arifa Arif, Mahmood Raza, and Zunaira Ishtiaq (2017) find that employee engagement, work-life balance, and employee cynicism are highly correlated. Arvind Mallik, Lakshmi Mallik, and Keerthi DS (2019), to drive their organizations to peak performance, managers and supervisors must put out front the human face of their organization. A significant reason employee involvement has grown because it has been shown to increase employee commitment to their organizations. By involving employees actively in decision-making, company leaders affirm the value of their employees. Employees naturally develop deeper commitments to organizational and departmental objectives when they help set them and are involved in achieving them by offering input and making decisions that affect success. Employees become more involved in organizational strategy with the greater involvement engendered by their increased responsibility. They begin to look at colleagues and customers differently and their commitment to the company and its future growth. Malik Shaharyar, Mushtaq Ahmad Baloch, Muhammad Ahsan Tariq, Seemal Mushtaq, and Adeel Mushtaq (2014) show performance appraisal's impact on the employee's performance. The management or the line managers set the benchmark performance so that it helps in evaluating the performance of the employees individually or collectively as a group. Florence K. Muindi (2011) indicates that a significantly strong positive correlation exists between job satisfaction and participation in decision-making. Bhanu Priya and Dr Satish Soni (2017) found a significant relationship between demographic variables like job role, gender, age, education, and impact of occupational should adopt new coping strategies to improve the bank's better level.

Ayman Zakaria Najeeb and Dr Ali Falah Dalain (2013) depict that any company's growth is now highly dependable on the use of Information and communication technology specifically. Lisa Olsson (2012) thesis examines leadership and creativity in research. Artsem Lashchonau and Ileana Androniu Pardal Monteiro (2015) show that appraisal satisfaction and procedural fairness are significantly positively related directly and indirectly to employees' motivation, while perceived accuracy impacts employees' motivation just indirectly. Satisfied employees lead to satisfied customers. Such commitment also leads to decreased staff turnover and reduced cost of hiring and training. Human resources practitioners in a learning organization can greatly promote employees' job involvement and improve performance. Besides developing policies to foster employee engagement at work, managers need to pay careful attention to the recruitment, training, reward, and recognition dimensions that affect involvement behaviour—employee's job involvement and satisfaction in a learning organization by Deepanjana Varshney (2019). The quantitative study results showed that serving and mentoring others positively affects employee performance and satisfaction, while coaching others only affects performance. Monitoring others did not show any relationship with employee effectiveness. Empowering employees invigorates leadership by removing the stress of day-to-day management responsibilities. It can be said that employee empowerment

and organizational stress are important concepts affecting working life. The fact that employees do not have enough components of employee empowerment increases their stress levels by Mustafa Demirkiran, Serap taşkaya 2016. Caral Lopes and Dhara Kachalia (2016) As a result, the level of stress faced by the employees in the banking sector is also overgrowing. Gholamreza Jandaghi, Ali Mokhles, and Hamid Bahrami (2011) explore job security's impact on employees' commitment and job satisfaction in Qom municipalities. Anees Ullah Karamat (2013) aimed to determine the impact of leadership behaviours on organizational performance. Mary Christina D and Kanishka. K (2014) deals with stress and its impact on productivity. Steven D. Raymer and Jeanette Cleveland (2014) results showed that leadership did not affect responsibility or empowerment, while culture significantly affected commitment and empowerment. Shaun Macgregor Gordon (2016) addresses creativity and innovation literature and explores the necessity for creativity in implementing service innovations. Additionally, people own the responsibility given to them and the manager/employee relationship benefits accordingly. Public relations specialists, employers, human relations staff, and managers face problems with employee morale. Hundreds of organizations and companies have problems with morale, but few have found ways to solve them. Often, it is a lack of understanding between employees and supervisors by Allison Rohner (1999).

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research can be considered exploratory as this research has attempted to get an insight into the research area, on which no significant work has been found in the context of food manufacturing industries in Kerala. For this research, a mixed-methods approach has been used as facts and information from secondary sources have been collected, and data in the form of respondents' feedback have been gathered through structured and unstructured questionnaires. Moreover, the present research can also be classified as inductive and applied research. It is inductive as the present study intends to logically infer and establish a relationship between employee empowerment and employee performance based on observations. Also, it is an applied work, as they attempt to investigate practical problems and issues on the concept and theories on employee empowerment and employee performance and their relationship has been made. From the research philosophy perspective, the present research has followed epistemology as the research philosophy in the interpretive paradigm. As mentioned earlier, the present research is based on primary and secondary data collected from respective sources. A survey was conducted through the structured questionnaire to collect primary data, and secondary data were collected from the reports of the various journals and books published by other third-party organizations. A total of 21 questions were asked through the questionnaire, and the validity of the questionnaire was tested. The population size for this research is approximated at around 600 employees of five food manufacturing industries in Kerala. With a margin of error of 12.61% and a confidence level of 95%, the research targeted a sample size of 110 respondents with an estimated response rate of 100%. However, the same was sent to approximately 110 employees working in Kerala's five food manufacturing industries. Responses were registered with the help of the Likert scale and codes associated with each response. While collecting feedback through a questionnaire, simple random sampling without replacement technique was used in each company. A more detailed analysis of the respondents' profiles shows that 33% are factory workers. 55% of respondents were middle managers, 7% were managers, and 5% were senior managers. The age group of respondents - 91.6% belonged to the age group 21 – 30 yrs, the rest were 31-40 yrs, and less than 1% belonged to the age group 41 -50 yrs and above 50 yrs. Years of experience - 47% of respondents had 3 to 5 years of work experience, 29% had one to three years of experience, 14% had less than one year experience, and the rest had more than five years of work experience. 60% of the respondents were male, and the rest, 40%, were female.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive analysis has been carried out to describe the respondents' profile and response patterns. Standard statistical tools such as mean, median, mode, standard deviation, standard variance, one-sample t-test, and correlation coefficient have also been used to test the research hypotheses. Table 1 depicts the respective questions related to each of the research objectives.

Table 1 Research objectives and research questions		
Research objective No.	Research objective statement	Related questions (Refer to questionnaire)
1	To identify the level of motivation among employees who should enhance their level of performance	Question 1- Question 3
2	To examine the degree to which employees feel empowered in the food manufacturing industries in Kerala	Question 4- Question 11
	To evaluate the relationship between employee empowerment and	

3	employee performance in the food manufacturing industries in Kerala	Question12-Question 20
4	To suggest ways to improve the performance of employees in the food manufacturing industries inKerala	Question 21

Four research objectives are identified, and twenty-one questions are identified to prepare the questionnaire. The questions are prepared based on different articles and in-depth studies related to the subject. From Table 1, it is seen that specific questions were prepared to accomplish different research objectives.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Response Patterns against Questions Asked to Identify the Level of Motivation among Employees

ISSUES	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance
Encouragement from supervisor	3.33	3	3	0.86	0.74
Positive morale	3.54	4	4	0.87	0.76
Overall job satisfaction in the current market condition	3.51	4	4	0.96	0.91

Table 2 depicts the present level of motivation among the employees of the food manufacturing industries in Kerala. It is found that the average mean of responses from question 1 to question 3 has remained 3.46, which is above average on a 5-point Likert scale. However, the standard deviation and standard variance calculated on each response against the first three questions are moderate. Regarding positive morale, respondents have given relatively positive feedback, and median and mode scores of 4 represent these phenomena occurring in response patterns. The standard deviation and standard variance show moderate inconsistency in responses. The first three questions asked to identify the level of motivation among employees, and the results indicate that motivation level is above average, but it is not sufficient to get the maximum result.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Response Patterns against Questions Asked to Examine the Degree to Which Employees Feel Empowered in the food manufacturing industries in Kerala.

ISSUES	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance
Level of superior influence	3.05	3	3	1.06	1.12
Control over job	3.91	4	4	0.82	0.67
Group potency	3.83	4	4	0.81	0.66
Self-determination	3.30	3	3	1.13	1.28
Impact creation	3.44	4	4	0.90	0.82
Competence building	3.38	4	4	0.87	0.75
Meaningfulness in work	3.25	3	4	1.07	1.15
Autonomy in decision making	3.21	3	4	1.08	1.16

The response pattern shows that control over job is moderately high, and a median and mode of 4 represents the most frequently occurring response. From Table 3, it is found that the highest positive feedback has been registered control over the job(Q5), which is calculated through mean as 3.91, and median and mode represent the higher frequency of occurrence of such responses.

Standard deviation and standard variance also show more consistent feedback from the respondents' side. Though on the issue of self-determination, respondents seem to be highly inconsistent. The response pattern reveals that the employees from the food manufacturing industry feel empowered. The degree shown in the result column requires more empowering activities from the management side.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Response Patterns against Questions Asked to Evaluate the Relationship between Employee Empowerment and Employee Performance in the food manufacturing industries in Kerala: Employee Empowerment Factors on the Extent of Enhanced Performance Encouragement.

ISSUES	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Variance
Autonomy to take decisions	2.70	2	2	0.81	0.65
Meaningfulness of work	3.31	3	4	0.98	0.97
Impact of work	3.16	3	4	0.99	0.98
Competence to do the work	2.75	3	3	0.58	0.33
Self-determination to take decision	2.87	3	3	0.69	0.48
Resources used	2.75	3	3	0.71	0.50
Supervisors' involvement	2.66	3	2	0.72	0.52
Collective belief within the group	2.77	3	2	0.82	0.67
Overall organizational culture	2.83	3	3	0.80	0.64

Table 4 shows that the mean score of all the questions listed is above 2.86, representing that most employees accept the role of all these environmental factors in improving their performance at work. The median and mean also depict a similar opinion of the employee. Where 3 is the most often selected option. The standard deviation and standard variance show relatively moderate consistency in opinions. It is also found that the Meaningfulness of work remained the most preferred chosen factor, which according to the pattern of opinions, influences most of the performance improvements. Superiors' involvement has shown a minor performance. The employees are not fully aware of the empowerment factors which affect their performance level.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of response patterns against questions asked to suggest ways improve performance of the employees in food manufacturing industries in Kerala: Based on the Most Preferred Factor Selection Method

Factors	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Rank
Impact of work	19%	19%	1
Meaningfulness of work	17%	36%	2
Resources	15%	51%	3
Group potency	15%	66%	4
Autonomy to make decisions	14%	80%	5
Competence	10%	90%	6
Impact of work	19%	19%	1
Meaningfulness of work	17%	36%	2
Resources	15%	51%	3

According to the above observation, it is found that impact of work remained most favoured factor to improve the performance of employees. In contrast, organizational culture has been identified by the least number of respondents as the most preferred factor of improving performance at the workplace.

Testing the Hypothesis

Three hypotheses have been formulated for the present research. Statistical tools like one sample t-test and correlation coefficient have been used to test these null hypotheses.

Null Hypotheses 1: The employees in the food manufacturing industry in Kerala are not motivated to enhance their performance.

One sample t-test analysis was conducted to test the null hypothesis. For this testing, the significance level is set at 0.10. Feedback on three questions (Q1, Q2, and Q3) has been considered for testing this null hypothesis. These questions were asked to get feedback on Encouragement from the supervisor (Question 1), Positive morale Question 2), and Overall job satisfaction in the current market condition (Question 3) have been used for testing hypothesis 1 (Table 6).

Table 6. One-Sample T-Test Analysis for Testing of Null Hypothesis 1

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 3.46					
	T	Significance		Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		One-Sided p	Two-Sided p		Lower	Upper
Q1	-1.62	0.05	0.11	-0.13	-0.29	0.03
Q2	0.92	0.18	0.36	0.08	-0.09	0.24
Q3	0.54	0.30	0.59	0.05	-0.13	0.23

Null Hypothesis 2: The employees in the food manufacturing industry in Kerala are not sufficiently empowered in their roles. From Table 7, it is found that the P one-tail value for all the three factors is greater than the significance level set. Therefore, the null hypothesis is not rejected. To test this null hypothesis one-sample t-test is used; the significance level for the test has also been set at 0.10. Table 7 represents all the different aspects of employee empowerment identified in the literature review and incorporated in the questionnaire. Table 7. One-Sample T-Test Analysis for Testing of Null Hypothesis 2

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 3.42					
	T	Significance		Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		One-Sided p	Two-Sided p		Lower	Upper
Q4	-3.63	0.00	0.00	-0.37	-0.57	-0.17
Q5	6.26	0.00	0.00	0.49	0.33	0.64
Q6	5.27	0.00	0.00	0.41	0.25	0.56
Q7	-1.11	0.13	0.27	-0.12	-0.33	0.09
Q8	0.19	0.42	0.85	0.02	-0.15	0.19
Q9	-0.46	0.32	0.65	-0.04	-0.20	0.13
Q10	-1.62	0.05	0.11	-0.17	-0.37	0.04
Q11	-2.06	0.02	0.04	-0.21	-0.41	-0.01

From the above table (table 7), it is observed that the value for P one-tail is more significant than 0.10 across all the different factors. Therefore, it can be concluded that null hypothesis 2 is not rejected.

Null hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between empowerment and performance improvement in Kerala's food manufacturing industry. The relationship between employee empowerment factors identified through literature review and incorporated in the questionnaire (such as autonomy, Meaningfulness, impact, competence, etc.) and employee performance has been individually tested (Table 8). The correlation coefficient technique has been used to test the last and final hypothesis.

Employee Empowerment Factors	Correlation Coefficient
Autonomy	0.477
Meaningfulness	0.13
Impact	0.058
Competence	0.379
Self-Determination	0.321
Resources and Specialization	0.399
Supervisor's Influence	0.343
Group Potency	0.326
Organizational Culture	0.533

It can be observed from the above table that all the factors individually show a correlation coefficient, which is approximately greater than 0.3, which indicates that there is a positive relationship, as the values are closer to +1. The correlation between organizational culture and employee performance and autonomy and employee performance seems to be highest compared to the other factors. Hence based on this observation, the null hypothesis stands not rejected.

FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

The following findings can be identified from the data analysis, Literature review, observations, and testing of null hypotheses. The overall motivation level of the employees seems to be moderate in the food manufacturing industry in Kerala, and the exact requirements to be improved to a great extent as per the study. The same was reflected via

testing the null hypothesis, where findings come out as the lack of acceptance of the employees' empowerment phenomenon. Different phenomena have been noted regarding the degree to which employees feel empowered in the

Null Hypothesis	Null hypothesis statement	Statistical tools applied	Results of testing of the null hypothesis
01	The employees in the food manufacturing industry in Kerala are not motivated to enhance their performance	One sample t-test	Accepted
02	The employees in the food manufacturing industry in Kerala is not sufficiently empowered in their roles.	One sample t-test	Accepted
03	There is no significant relationship between empowerment and improvement in the performance of the employees in the food manufacturing industry in Kerala	Correlation-coefficient	Accepted

food manufacturing industry in Kerala. It is observed that the Testing null hypotheses also prove the same phenomenon. Most firms and managements are keen to empower their employees. The majority of employees accept the role of all these empowerment factors in improving their performance at work, though consistency in feedback has remained an issue. Therefore, it cannot be said that employees in the food manufacturing industry in Kerala are sufficiently empowered in their roles.

Testing and interpreting the hypothesis to find the relationship between different factors and their impact on employee performance reveals a not-so-significant relationship. Regarding the relationship between employee empowerment and improved performance, it is found that the impact of work has remained the most preferred chosen factor, which according to the pattern of opinions, influences most the improvement in the performance of employees. The supervisor's involvement is the least important factor. Regarding the aspects of suggested ways to improve the performance of employees in the food manufacturing industry in Kerala, the impact of work has been chosen as the most preferred option by the most significant part of respondents. In contrast, the organizational culture has remained the most preferred option of the minor part of respondents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above observations, the following recommendations can be suggested. As the overall scenario is not favourable for employee empowerment employees in the food manufacturing industry in Kerala, serious attention must be given to planned improvement. The impact of Covid 19 on an employee's personal and professional life is broad, so this study highly recommends empowerment activities to overcome this situation. As it is found that the employees' observation on the factors affecting individual performance is also inconsistent, strategic initiatives are recommended to collect their observations across hierarchy and improve their performance and the performance of the overall organizations regularly. As the study has shown that few factors are considered more important than others from employees' side for improving their performance, employers should have considered those preferred factors on a priority basis.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

Employee empowerment and its impact on employee performance are widely researched areas in business management. In the contemporary corporate environment, the same has become more prominent due to the growing importance of large-scale corporate restructuring, the creation of autonomous work teams, and other significant developments. Food manufacturing industries have witnessed the large-scale transformation, and employee empowerment has become a joint endeavour across the globe. Improvement in employee performance through employee empowerment has therefore become strategic essentiality and the above study, though conducted at a microscopic scale, indicates the much to do things in the future. The research can be further enhanced and improved in the following manners: This research was carried out at a smaller scale, and a reasonably small sample was used for data collection. The impact-based limitation of this research was that it was only conducted on a selected number of food manufacturing industries in Kerala. Hence the findings of the study may be extended to the entire food manufacturing industry. The same can be extended in future research to obtain more accurate outcomes. A single source questionnaire has been used in the present research as a primary form of data collection, and the data gathered from the respondents on these questionnaires might have a slight chance of duplication of answers despite utmost caution attempted. A separate study can be conducted based on differences in respondents' opinions according to their designations, tenure of employment etc., on the issues of

employee empowerment and employee performance, which has not been done in the present study. This study focused on employee empowerment, and limited findings are there regarding the impact of Covid 19.

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